

A Bride inside a Casket and Other Tales

Manoj Das



Illustrations
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Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

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THE TALKING CAVE

Deep in the forest lived a lone jackal. He had chosen a cosy cave for his home. However, he had very little time to relax inside it except at night. That was because he had to roam about in search of a good breakfast, a better lunch and the best possible dinner.

In another part of the forest lived an aged tiger. Time was when he would dispatch into his tummy a pair of choice rabbits in the morning, a bonny deer or lamb at noon and, in the evening, either a travelling salesman or the king's constable nabbed from the road that meandered by the forest.

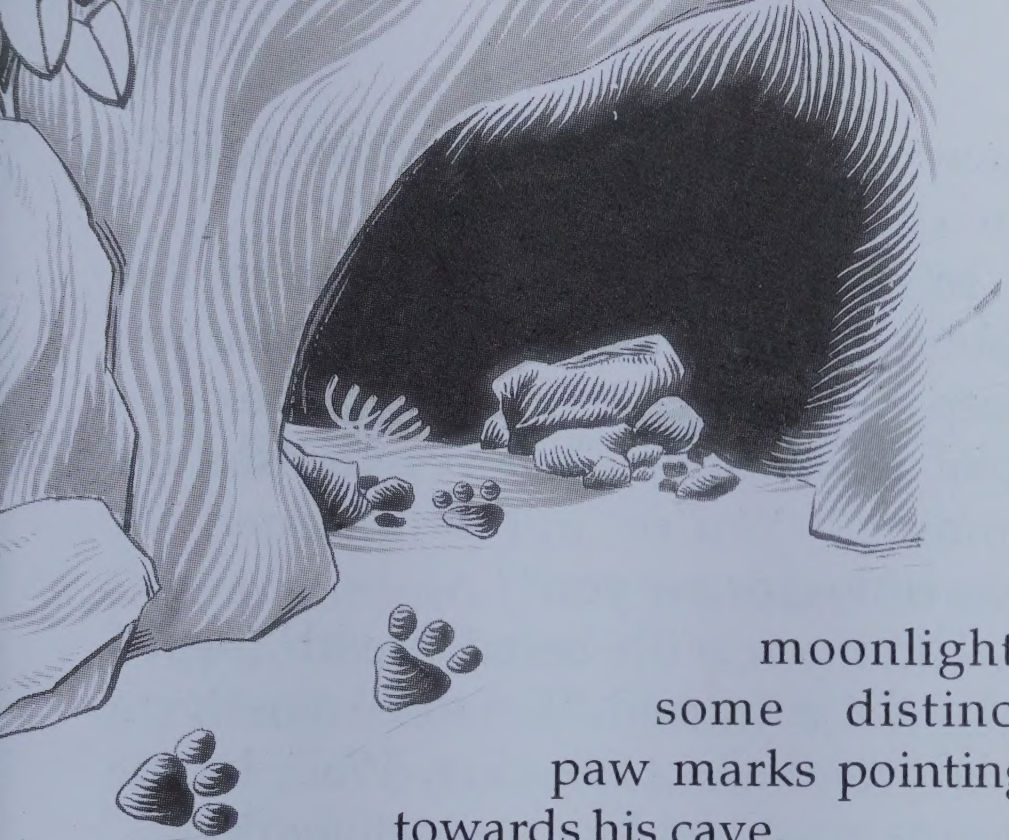
But he had grown weak. Since his recovery from a massive heart attack, he often wondered if he must go satisfied with giving chase only to turtles! And turtles hardly cared to visit the forest.



One winter evening, wandering on his aching legs, the tiger chanced upon the jackal's cave. Curiosity led him into it. He sniffed the air and knew the kind of creature that dwelt there.

"Let me lie down here. I can have a good rest. At the right moment, my supper would just walk into my mouth," he mumbled as he sprawled on the floor.

Late in the evening the jackal was on his way back home. He whistled merrily as he ambled along leisurely, dreaming of a blissful sleep. As he was just about to enter the cave, he saw, in the bright



moonlight,
some distinct
paw marks pointing
towards his cave.

“My, my! I never knew that my feet left such brilliantly outlined prints!” he said to himself, feeling rather flattered. “What a pity that I have no mirror. I seem to have grown as big as a tiger!”

But no sooner had he uttered the word ‘tiger’, than his heart shrank. He told himself, “The heart, however, does not seem to have grown as big as a tiger’s. In that case I doubt if my paws could have grown so big as well. And, well, does not mean that these prints cannot be mine?”

He bounded back and, looking at the

cave with great alarm, stood thoughtful for a moment.

In a flash came an inspiration. He shouted out, "Hello, cave, how come you keep mum tonight? Don't you give out a roar of welcome whenever you see me coming? You're not frightened of something, or are you?"

The tiger, with bated breath, heard what the jackal said. "I'm sure I must have frightened the cave silly. Well, by no means must I let him suspect anything!" he thought. Then, without wasting any time, he bellowed, "Welcome, jackal dear, welcome home, your sweet, sweet home!"

The jackal sprang up in an instant and ran for his life, his teeth rattling and his hair on end.

"A talking cave, eh? Whoever heard of it!" he muttered after reaching a safe place.



A BRIDE INSIDE A CASKET

On the outskirts of a town stood an old temple. A day did not pass without hundreds of devotees visiting it, heaping offerings of fruits, sweetmeats and coins before the deity.

A young man who thought himself very clever grew a tender beard and donned ochre clothes and took residence in a hut close by the temple. He sat with his eyes shut as if lost in meditation. But he took care to be seen by all the visitors to the temple. He rarely spoke.

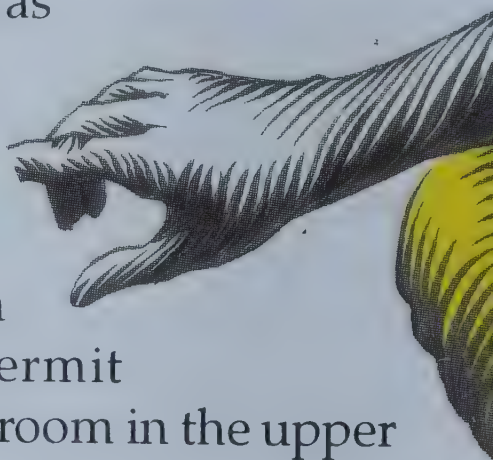
“Must be a holy man!” thought the devotees. By and by it became a custom with them to look him up after they had worshipped the deity. They bowed to him and placed before him gifts of food and money. The false hermit smiled at them and often placed his palm on their heads,

as if he was holy enough to bless them. They were pleased, for who would not like to be blessed by a holy man!

The fellow prospered. With the money the devotees offered, he built a fine house near the temple and lived happily. Soon half a dozen vagabonds collected around him. They pretended to be his disciples; he pretended to be their guru.

One day a wealthy merchant paid a visit to the temple. He was accompanied by his wife and their daughter. As they entered the gateway, their hands folded in devotion, the false hermit watched them from his room in the upper floor of his new house. The merchant's daughter was extremely beautiful.

"This is the kind of girl who deserves to marry me!" he thought and sent for the merchant as soon as the latter came out of the shrine. "I wish to see him alone," he instructed his messenger. And when the

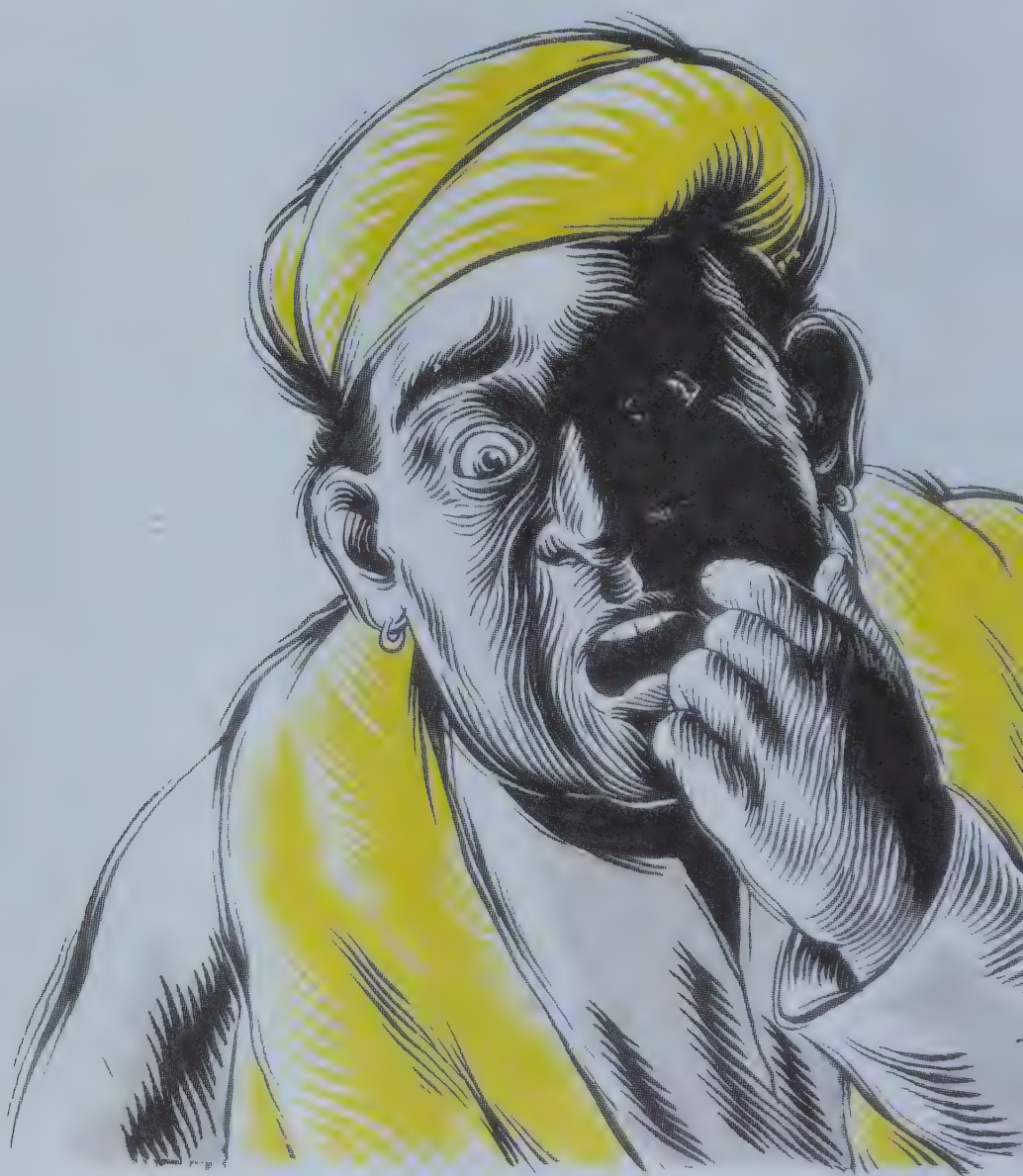




merchant came alone, he received him with many kind words.

The merchant was pleasantly surprised, for he knew that the holy man rarely spoke.

“Gentleman, who does not know that I hardly care to talk to ordinary mortals. It



is out of sheer compassion for you that I decided to take a break in my vow of silence. I have, naturally, the power to see the shape of things to come. I am sorry to say that before long a great misfortune is to befall you."

The merchant grew ashen pale. "My ship is abroad at sea. I have spent all I had to stock it with valuable merchandise. My luck depends on the ship's safe return," he said, a moan escaping his lips.

"Precisely," said the hermit. "For your information, your luck seems rather bleak. Your ship is encountering a violent storm right now! I will, to be sure, do my best to save it from total wreckage. But how long can I battle against your ill luck if its very cause is nurtured by yourself?"

The merchant fell at the hermit's feet. "I have no doubt that you are speaking a fat lot of sense, though I don't understand a grain of it. Please help me to root out the cause of my ill luck, I beg of you," he cried out.

"You alone can do that, old chap! I can

only guide you in that regard. Listen. Do not lose heart. The cause of your ill luck is your daughter! No power on earth or in heaven can protect you as long as she is by your side. You must give her up immediately," said the hermit.

"But, am I not her father? How can I give her up?" asked the perplexed merchant.

"Easily," answered the hermit. "Shut her up in a casket and float the casket in the river! You alone can do it. I can't do it for you! Do it tonight by all means and do not forget to place a lamp on the casket."

"Sir! Pardon me. I cannot do away with my child in that manner. That would be worse than losing my ship," stammered out the merchant, violently shaking his head.

The hermit laughed. He planted an affectionate slap on the merchant's cheek. "You naive old chap, don't I see your daughter's future too in the mirror of my finger-nails? It is so written in her destiny

that she would be rescued by a wonderful young man who would also be pleased to marry her. You cannot dream of a better bridegroom than he in the whole town, nay, in the whole kingdom."

"Oh, say that!" The merchant sighed with relief. After some further reassurances from the hermit, he agreed to abide by his advice and took leave of him. He was also told about the exact time of the night when he should launch her sleeping daughter into her unknown destiny.

Although the merchant was left in no doubt about the bright future of his daughter, it proved very painful for him to put the innocent girl to deep slumber through some sedative and then to put her in a casket and float it down the river, with a lamp on it.

The false hermit, with some of his trusted disciples, waited impatiently on the desolate river-bank, his heart running pit-a-pat. Around midnight, he spotted a faint flicker in mid-stream. He was



delighted. At his order a pair of his disciples swam into the river and drew the floating casket ashore.

It was with great difficulty that the hermit suppressed his glee at the smooth success of his scheme. He could have straightaway proposed to marry the merchant's daughter. But he was not sure if the merchant would welcome the proposal and, even if he did, if the girl would. Now, he felt sure, while the merchant would be thankful to him for being saved from a devastating misfortune, the girl should be grateful to him for being rescued from certain death. He ordered his disciples to carry the casket into his bedroom. He then dismissed them and, as excited as a rat at the sight of cheese, took the lid off the casket.

Alack the experience that awaited him! No sooner had the lid been removed than he received a sharp slap in the face. Horrified, he tried to take a closer look at what emerged from the casket, but

received an instant scratch in the eye.

As he covered his eyes with his palms, a savage bite took away a chunk of his bright nose.

He shrieked and rushed out of his room, but not before the strange creature that hopped out of the casket had pulled his beard and planted a heavy spank on his cheek. Then it jumped out of the window, leapt onto a tree and disappeared.

The holy man ran for his life, at a total loss to understand how a beautiful girl could have changed into a dreadful monster.

“A witch, a witch!” he shrieked while running, but all that came out of his throat was confused gurgle.

He never returned. That was wise of him, for his disciples could have hardly known him after what the monkey had done to his face!

But as for the merchant's daughter, she did no doubt get the best bridegroom in the kingdom. It so happened that before

the false hermit had seen the casket, it had been discovered by the prince of the land who was returning by boat from a hunting spree in the forest. Attracted by the lamp, he had brought the casket aboard his boat and opened it, only to discover the sleeping beauty. He had captured a ferocious monkey in the forest. Under a whim he substituted the beast for the beauty and set the casket adrift again. He did not even forget to put the lamp back in its place.

In the morning the prince led the girl to her father. The merchant, though delighted, was not surprised. In fact, he expected such a miracle to happen. Had the holy man not prophesied about the girl getting the best bridegroom in the kingdom?

He told the prince that he ought to marry her, for that was in her destiny!

The prince blushed. Never could he have hoped for a more beautiful bride!



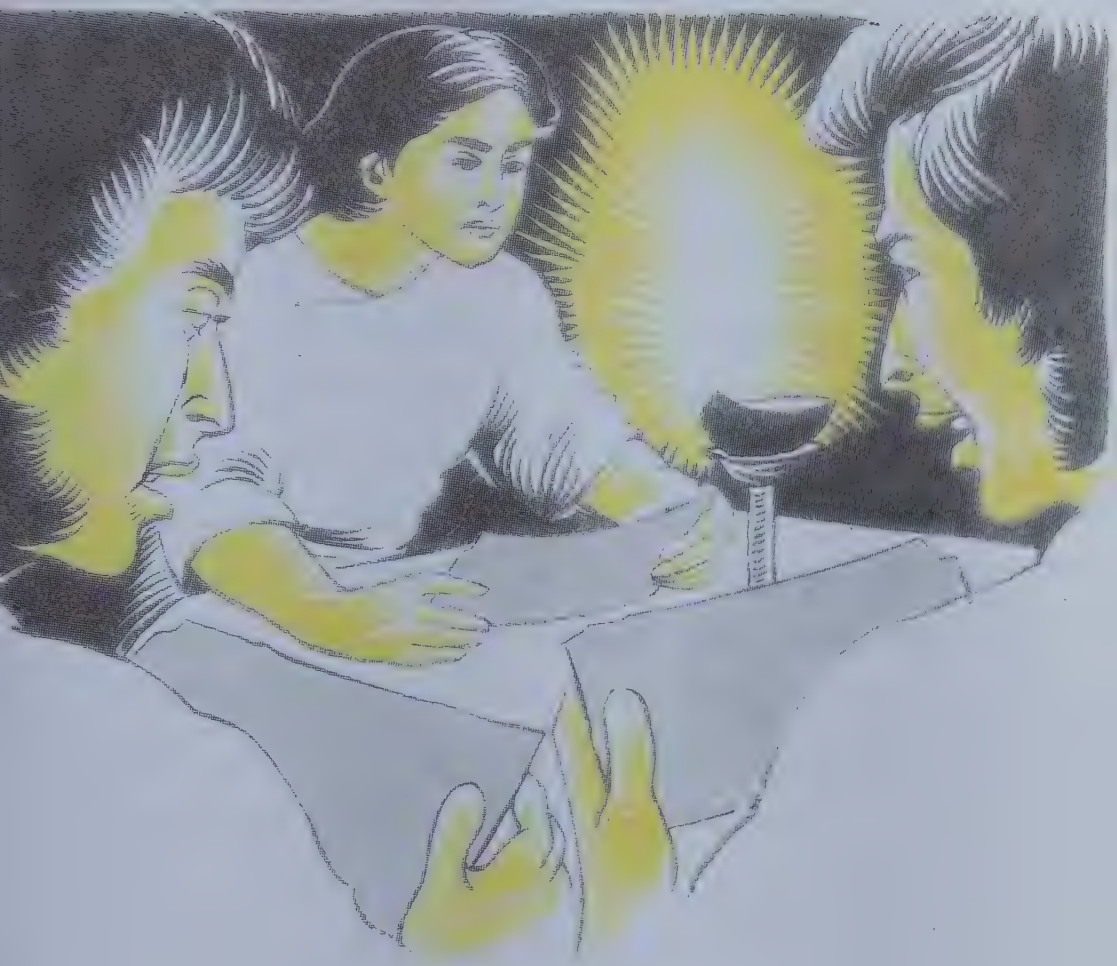
THOSE WHO REVIVED THE TIGER

Long, long ago there were three young friends who lived in the Ashram of a guru.

The guru had a number of disciples and he taught them subjects according to their interest and capacity. But what the three friends loved most was the art of performing miracles. The guru had a stack of manuscripts which explained the art. Whenever they found a chance, they read them avidly.

Sometimes, in the dead of night, when all the inmates of the Ashram were asleep and all was quiet, they would gather the necessary items and practice their voodoo.

“Boys, try to be good, try to be wise, try to seek the truth in all things. Why waste your time and talents dabbling in magic and miracles? They would never



lead you anywhere near your goal!" the guru told them time and again.

But the guru's warning fell on deaf ears. By and by, the three friends learnt to perform a variety of miracles. They were amazed at their own wonderful achievements.

"The wide world outside this forest ought to have a taste of our power. Why don't we go out and dazzle the people

with our miracles?" proposed one of them. The other two were taken up with the idea. "Well, well, why not!" they said, in agreement with their friend.

"Kindly allow us to tour the region," they appealed to the guru, standing before him with their hands folded.

"I'm afraid the time is not yet ripe for you to wander all by yourselves!" said the guru thoughtfully.

"How do you say so, sir! Aren't we grown-up enough? Please don't refuse us the permission, O Master, for we are quite capable of taking care of ourselves. We are sure, our glory would reach your ears before long. And, sir, you can be sure, as we grow in fame, you too would not be forgotten, for we will not hide the fact that we were your disciples!" assured the three friends.

"Don't bother about my fame or lack of it," advised the guru. "If you must go, better take our Bhola with you. Look upon him as one of your brothers. And pay heed to his counsel should he give any."

Now, Bhola was an illiterate youth who served the guru. The three bright scholars did not relish the idea of taking him along as their companion. But the guru had already passed his instruction with an air of finality.

They soon set forth on their journey. "We are on our way to fame," said one. "And wealth too," said another. "Who knows if we'd ever care to return to the Ashram! The world might very well make gurus of ourselves!" said the third. They talked of the secrets they had learnt—how to sprout a pair of wings on a toad—how to change a string or rope into a serpent—how to tame the imps and make them dance, so on and so forth. Occasionally they cast a look of contempt at Bhola. He walked silently behind them, carrying their luggage.

The road wound through a forest. It was noon. They chose the cool shade of a huge tree to sit down and ordered Bhola to cook their lunch. Bhola got down to work.

But the friends were in no mood to pass their time idly. One of them saw some crumbled bones scattered in front of the tree.

“Let me bring these bones together and make a complete skeleton of them!” he proposed enthusiastically.

And he lost no time in chanting a certain hymn and sprinkling a little water on the bones. Lo and behold! The disjointed bones came together. They made the skeleton of a tiger. The beast, when alive, must have been big enough to fight a lion.

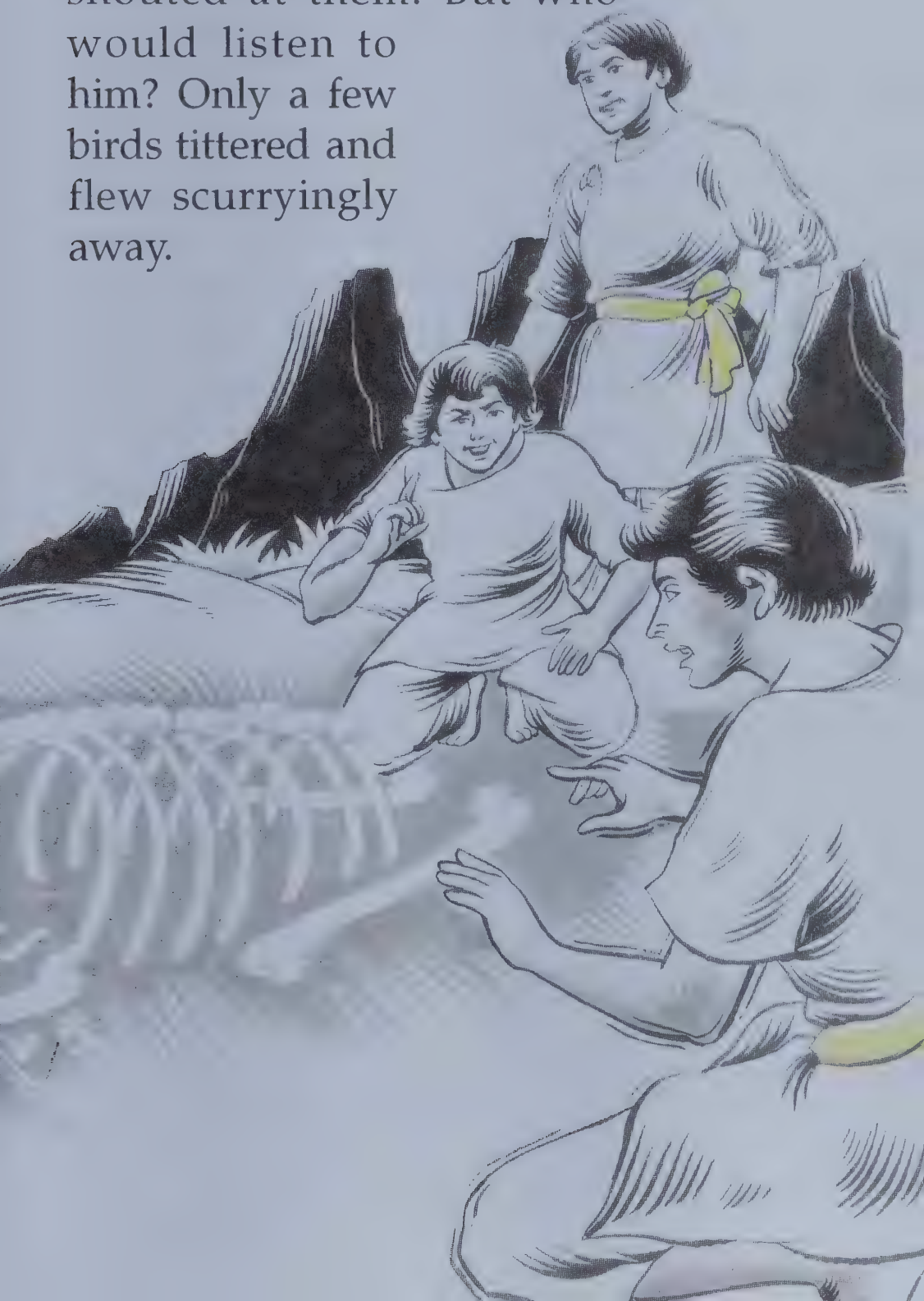
They were agog with excitement. They danced around the skeleton and sang their own glory.

“I can endow it with flesh and blood!” announced the second friend.

Bhola stopped cooking and stood up,

looking aghast.

“Don’t act like fools!” he shouted at them. But who would listen to him? Only a few birds tittered and flew scurryingly away.



The second friend chanted his hymn. To their great amusement, the skeleton grew into robust carcass.

“Do you wish to see what I can do?” asked the third friend. And gleefully he shouted out the answer himself, “I can breathe life into it!”

“Do so by all means! It will be such a charming pet!” exclaimed the other two.

“Don’t for heaven’s sake!” cried out Bhola. “Don’t forget that you have promised to win fame for yourselves and our guru. Let’s leave the carcass here and proceed to the locality. You can perform your miracles before crowds who will appreciate them.”

“The tiger, when restored to life, will feel so grateful to us! How wonderful it would be to see it behave before us like a dog, wagging its tail and licking our feet. People would be simply amazed! We’d be looked upon as gods!” the friends continued to exclaim in total disregard of all that Bhola said.

Bhola looked for a tall tree. He climbed

it as soon as he had found one. He had just reached its top when he heard a lusty roar.

Yes, the third scholar had breathed life into the carcass and the tiger had just stood up. It yawned and stretched its limbs. Then it looked around and gave out yet another roar, more lusty and terrific.

Before long its roving eyes fell on the three friends. Instantly it sprang upon them. It was quite easy for the beast to do so, for the scholars stood huddled together, shivering like reeds in the winds.

The scholars fell crushed under the beast. It sat on them and devoured them with what seemed to be a century's hunger.

"How unfortunate!" the guru said and sighed, when he got a report of the incident from Bhola.



THE PROFESSOR FOX

Upon the river bank, on a cosy nook of the valley overshadowed by a huge bush, lived a turtle with her three infants. The tiny tots—let us call them turtlets—round and soft, soon attracted the attention of a fox who lived in the forest spread along the river bank.

One morning the turtle and the fox met. The fox greeted the turtle most affably and asked—as though purely out of courtesy—

"Madame, how is it that nowadays I don't see you as often as I used to?"

"Mr Fox, a lover of nature I am indeed, but I hardly find any time to roam about our beautiful forest now that I have three





toddlers to look after," replied the turtle.

"I am glad that you take your young ones so seriously. That means an ideal mother. But tell me, what are you doing about their education?" asked the fox.

"Education?" fumbled the turtle. "Well, to be frank. I had never given any thought to that!"

"I suspected as much. That is where most of the mothers err." Observed the fox gravely. "They pamper their kids and that is almost all that they do. Then they look on helplessly as the young ones grow up into the same stupid beings as themselves. I shudder to think of the future of our forest which was once proud of her scholarly denizens," the fox remarked and sighed.

Educating her little ones was a wonderful idea. The turtle grew very thoughtful. Then she implored the fox to tell her how to go about it.

"You see, I gave up my professorship long ago. All my students are now holding prestigious positions in the forest, in the

service of King Lion. However, since you are my neighbour, I can undertake educating your children. Come on, hand them over to me."

The thankful turtle led her young to the residence of the fox, which was a spacious hole, one furlong away, and returned to her bush, sad at heart but beaming with hope.

That very night the fox ate up one of the turtlets. When the mother turtle went to look them up the next day, he brought the remaining two out of his hole and then led them back and brought one of them again. The mother turtle ambled home happily.

She paid them a visit again the second day. Although there was only one



turtlet surviving, the fox brought it out three times and she returned satisfied.

But of course the fox had nothing to show to the mother turtle the third day. He therefore promptly explained away her children's absence by saying that they had been sent to his elder brother, who happened to be the retired director of public instruction in the forest, for higher learning.



The mother turtle was not sure if her children deserved so much attention.

“Hello, at what price did you sell your kids to the fox?”

Taken aback by the question which lacked culture, the turtle tried to locate its source. It was a raven, well known for his rough talk.

“Sell?” she scoffed. “It is for their education, my dear raven, and because I have been keeping the future of the forest in mind I have entrusted my boys to Professor Fox!” she said proudly.

The raven gave out a whoopee which could either be derisive laugh or a cry. Then, facing the bewildered turtle, he told her what he had seen the sly fox do to her young ones.

The turtle stood shocked. Then, mad with fury, she went to confront the fox. But he slipped away easily. The turtle could do nothing more than curse him for a full hour. The fox listened to her with a villainous grin on his face.

But the turtle was determined to take

her revenge. One day, while the fox was crossing the river, she swam under the water and caught one of his legs. But the sly fox giggled and said, "What fun! How confidently the turtle bites a stick of bamboo mistaking it to be my leg!"

The turtle let go of the fox's leg at once and the fox jumped to the shore. Only then did the turtle realise how she had been deceived.

Hours passed. But the turtle kept up her vigil. When the fox reappeared on the river-bank, she swam close to the surface of the water, waiting to catch him when he would cross the river again. But the fox waited. After a long time the turtle surfaced to see what the fox was doing. At once the fox hopped on to her back and in another bounce crossed to the other side.

This was too much! The turtle swam back to her shelter and, hiding herself from others, shed bitter tears.

"I can understand your agony," said a hoarse but kind voice. The turtle looked

up. It was the raven.

"I will help you to punish the wicked fox. Now, do as I say. While I sat on the queen's window this morning, I heard that she is coming to bathe in the river this evening, for it is going to be an auspicious full-moon night. As soon as the queen is neck-deep in the water, swim near her stealthily and hang on to her necklace. To get rid of you, she will take off her necklace. As soon as she does that, slip away and see what happens next," counselled the raven.

The turtle agreed to act accordingly.

Soon after moon-rise, the queen, accompanied by her maids, reached the river-ghat. Her bodyguards waited near her bejewelled palanquin, a few yards away from the ghat.

As soon as the queen was neck-deep in the water, the turtle swam towards her and hung on to her diamond necklace. The horrified queen tore the necklace off her neck and, although the turtle slipped away instantly, gave out a shriek and



hurled the necklace onto the bank. Immediately, the raven swooped down and, picking up the necklace, flew away.

The queen's maids raised a hue and cry. At that the bodyguards rushed to the bank and, in the bright moonlight, saw the raven flying away with the necklace, the diamond beads glittering like a garland of stars. They ran after the raven raising their clubs and swords and shouting in order to scare it into dropping the precious ornament.

But the raven flew on undaunted,

neither too fast nor too high, but always beyond the reach of the arms of the bodyguards, till he reached the fox's shelter. He then dropped the necklace into the hole, in full sight of the queen's men, and flew away to the safety of a tall tree.

The bodyguards surrounded the hole and one of them thrust his sword into it. When the scared fox leapt out of it, the guards lost no time in bringing down their heavy clubs on his back. He fell dead, but not before giving out a loud howl which the turtle could hear from the river.

Even before the guards had time to return the necklace to the queen, the raven had triumphantly announced to the gleeful turtle the unceremonious end of the professor.

ALL IS FOR THE BEST

A certain prince, after his father's death, inherited the kingdom and a large fortune in gold. That he liked—liked very much indeed. What he disliked was inheriting his father's old minister.

Not that the minister stood in the way of the young king's feasting or merrymaking, but he always looked as serious as an old cat; his presence was enough to draw a thick wet blanket over the jolly spirit of the king and his companions.

Moreover, the minister was in the bad habit of muttering from time to time, "What happens, happens for the best if one knows how to take it." This irritated the king. "How on earth can a bad cold or a fall from horseback mean good, not to speak of the best?" he would ask his

confidants and would say, "The minister's common sense, through pretty long use, had become as blunt as his bald pate. Or maybe he has grown lazy and so inclined to take whatever came his way lying down, assuring himself that all was for the best!"

But the king would not allow his chief officer to remain such a dullard. Some zest must be infused into him. A little outing, a little participation in some exciting event should do him good—he thought.

So, one day he suggested that the minister join him in his hunting expedition.

"Very well," said the old minister, as usual.

It looked like an inauspicious day. A mushroom of dark cloud had sprouted on the horizon when the party set out on its journey. The prince hoped it would be swept away by the wind. But just when the party entered the forest there was a strong gust and a branch broke off a tall tree. It came crashing down on the king

himself. Luckily, the king escaped with only a small cut on his forehead. Nevertheless, he cried out in horror, when he mopped his face and saw a faint streak of blood on his palm. At that his bodyguard and the courtiers raised such a howl of concern that a hundred jackals residing in the nearby bushes joined in commotion.

But the minister smiled and consoled the king, saying, "Don't get upset, my Lord. Whatever happens, happens for the best!" And he added, "All we have to do is take everything in the right spirit."

Never before had these pet words of the minister sounded as sinister as they did then. The king trembled with rage and ordered his men to bundle him up and throw him into a dark deep pit close by. The order was instantly carried out. The king looked into the pit and shouted out gleefully. "Whatever happens, happens for the best. Isn't so? Now, do have a taste of your own theory. Good bye!"

The king and his men had not gone far



when a gale broke out, followed by a heavy downpour. All grew awfully dark. There were terrifying thunder-claps and a couple of trees, struck by lightening, collapsed. In panic all the king's men ran helter-skelter, leaving the king to himself.

All of a sudden the king was surrounded by a gang of bandits. In a



remote interior of the jungle the gang had its deity. It was a custom with them to sacrifice a human being at the altar of the deity on a certain night of the year. And the night had come.

The king tried to escape, but he was no match for the bandits. He was soon

captured, and led to their shrine. He was about to lose his life when the priest of the bandits observed the raw wound on his forehead. Disgusted, they threw him out, for the rite demanded that the man to be sacrificed must not have a single wound on his body.

The rain stopped. The king found himself in the heart of the forest and tried to grope his way out. When his men finally found him he was almost in a daze. However, they sent out shouts of great rejoicing.

The exhausted king sat down on a rock and sent some of his men to rescue the minister from the pit.

Before long the old man appeared before him, as calm as ever.

The king embraced him and, breaking into tears, said, "O my wise minister, I now realise the truth of your words. I would have been killed but for the wound on my forehead. Can you forgive me for the disrespect I have shown you?"

"Be assured, my noble king, that

whatever happened, happened for the best. The bandits, after leaving you, were desperately searching for another prey. They passed by the pit. I saw them but they could not see me. Had I not been in the pit, they would have seen me and surely led me for their ritual and by now my head and trunk would have been without each other," said the minister.



OPERATION MOUTH

Long long ago there was a king who had a good old minister. Never had a king known a wiser minister.

But one day the minister told the king that it was time for him to retire. He must devote his last days to plenty of dozing and snoozing.

It so happened that the minister had three young sons, all of whom looked equally bright and dutiful.

“If retire you must, my dear friend, then let me choose one of your sons to succeed you. It should be the eldest one, I suppose; what do you say?” the king asked his minister.

“That depends, my Lord, on what you expect of your minister. If you want daredevil, my eldest son, no doubt, should serve you well. If you want a clever man

for the position, your choice should fall on my second son. And if you wish to have a man of truth, my youngest son should suit the post best," replied the minister.

"How can you be so precisely sure about the characters of your sons? Can you prove your opinion about each of them to be correct?" demanded the king.

"I hope, I can, my Lord," replied the minister.

"Really, I would like you to do that!" said the king, growing quite curious.

"Very well, my Lord," said the minister after a pause. "I will give one single instruction to all the three. Let us see the way each one works it out," said the minister.

He then summoned all his sons into a room. The king watched them from a hidden alcove.

"Listen, my sons," said the minister in a tone that was as grave as a tiger's growl. "At the centre of the royal garden stands a very special rose plant. I want each of



you to go and pluck a rose each from it. Take your mission seriously. I should warn you of one danger though.

Plucking flowers from that particular plant is strictly forbidden. If you are caught, you ought to be able to escape punishment by using your mouths—I repeat—your mouths only.”

It was twilight. The sons bowed to their father and took leave of him. They entered the garden and stealthily approached the tree. But no sooner had they plucked the roses than they were caught by some alert guards.

The eldest son at once gave out a piercing cry and bared his teeth in a bid to bite the hand of the guard who caught him. The frightened guard loosened his grip, allowing the young man to make good his escape.

The second son threw the rose into his mouth and pretended innocence.

But the youngest son remained calm and let himself be led to the king.

"I know, my Lord, that it was forbidden plant. But I had no doubt in my mind about one thing: when you know that it was your wise minister who had asked me to pluck the flower, you would feel convinced that there must be some very sound reason behind it," the youngest son told the king.

"See, my Lord," said the minister, "each of the three, when caught, had used his mouth, for I had instructed them to do so. But each one had done so in his own way, according to his nature. One has used it violently, one has used it cleverly, and one has used it truthfully."

The amused king smiled and said, "Right, my dear minister, but all the three are worthy in their own ways. Your eldest son can become officer in the army and the second one can serve as my adviser. But your youngest son, the wise one, should step into the position you are vacating."



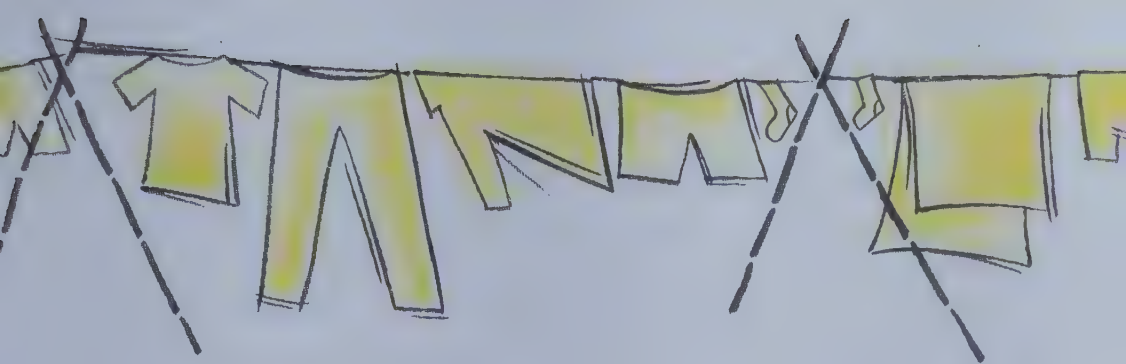


THE BLUE MONSTER

A lush forest on their river Ganga was the home of a large number of foxes. The forest offered varieties of fruits as well as edible smaller creatures to keep its fox population jolly and busy. But Chandarava, a new-fangled young fox, had developed a great fancy for domestic fowls. Every now and then he would sneak into the nearby village in search of his favourite food.

His friends warned him several times, saying, "Don't be an adventurer. There is plenty for us in the forest. Haven't our wise forefathers said that an empty stomach was preferable to a well-fed-back—well-fed with blows?"

"My back is foxy enough to give the slip to the smartest of sticks," Chandarava bragged about, and he derided his well-



wishers for their chicken-heartedness.

The village washerman had a brood of excellent fowls and for a long time Chandarava kept a greedy eye on them. One evening, determined to grab one of them before they had been led into their roost, he watched carefully from his lookout in a bush. What he did not know was, that the washerman too had kept an equally alert vigil on his brood.



Chandarava was about to achieve his end when the washerman spied him prowling around and gave him a furious chase. Chandarava ran for his life and in great panic jumped into the washerman's vat, full to the brim with indigo dye.

He managed to drag himself out after some struggle, but when his eyes fell on his own limbs, he felt that it would be better for him to die than to move about dyed in pure blue!

He hid in a bush for the night. When it was dawn, he climbed a rock in order to see if there was a ditch nearby where he could live without being seen by his fellow-creatures, till he had hit upon a way to reasonably comfortable death.

Just then an elephant was passing by. He goggled in amazement at the sight of a strange creature standing on the rock, all blue, glittering in golden sunlight.

"Wonderful things have begun to happen in our forest," he mumbled as he ran to inform the other patricians of the forest—the tigers and the lions—about his

exciting discovery.

The elephant's flight amused the blue fox tremendously. He waited to see what would happen next.

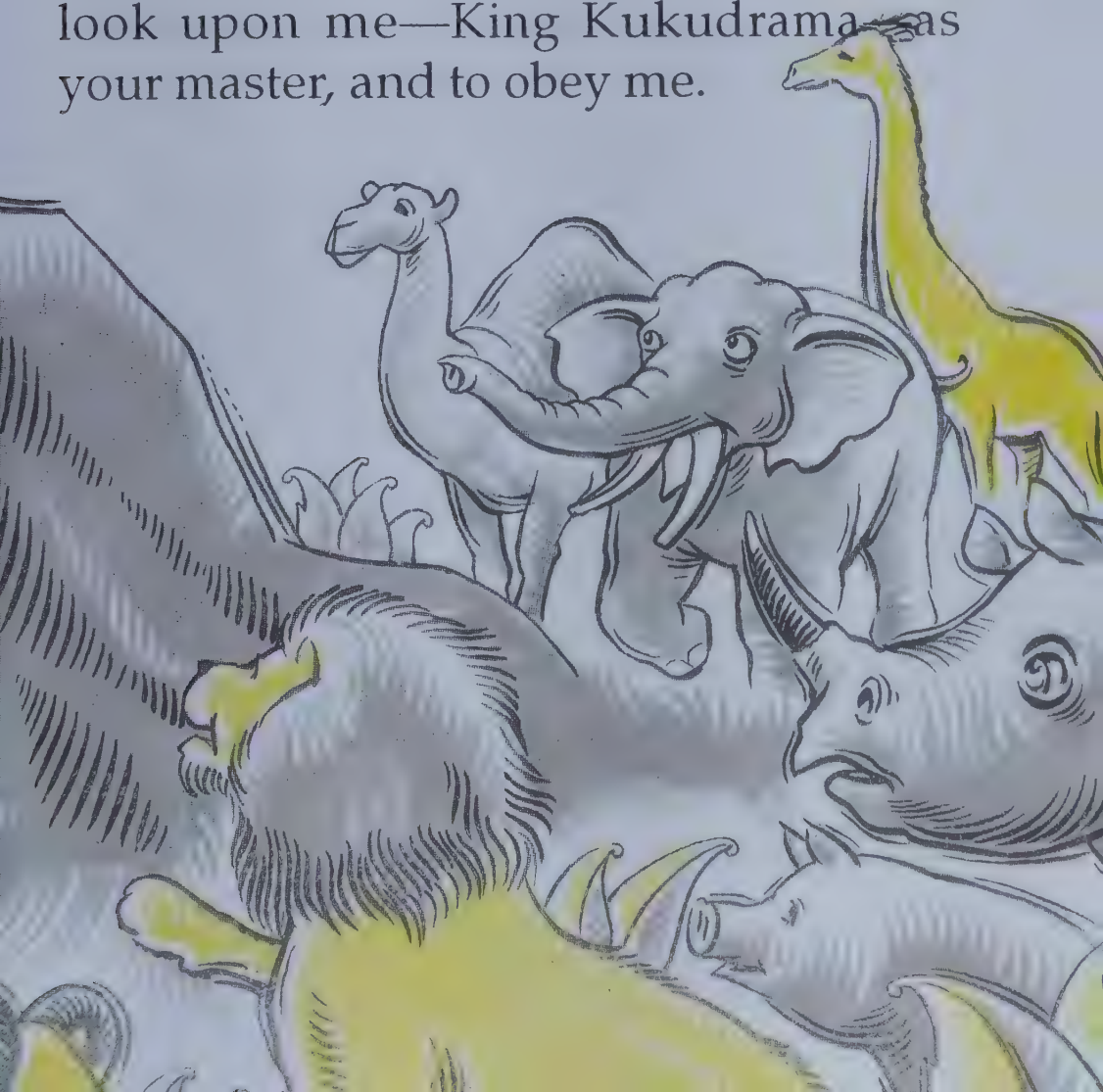
Very soon the leading animals gathered at the foot of the rock and their leader, an aged lion, asked with profound humility, "O queer blue being, who art thou and where from doest thou come? Our forefathers knew a lot. They even exchanged ideas with the elite of several faraway forests. But all the knowledge they have left for us tells us nothing about the existence of a creature like thee. Thou alone can enlighten us about thyself."

Chandrava immediately grasped the situation. He did not fail to see the great promise that lay hidden in that moment. He assumed an awful look and fixed his gaze on the audience below and said, "How do you expect your forefathers to have known anything about me? Do you take me to be one belonging to this wretched little world of yours? Don't you see I have just descended from the blue?"



“Indeed, we can see that, for none of the animals ever saw you enter our forest from outside. Now, will you kindly state the purpose of your gracious visit?” asked the lion.

“To lord over you, of course!” announced Chandarava. “God in his infinite wisdom asked me to take charge of the forest, to set things right here. Henceforth it will be your sacred duty to look upon me—King Kukudrama—as your master, and to obey me.



“We will, O blessed King Kukudrama,” said the animals in a chorus as they bowed to the fox. And the fox broadcast his first order immediately: “Listen you lions, tigers and elephants, I wish to see this forest as an ideal home for only the noble and large animals like you. The inferior and undignified beasts have no place here. To begin with, I want you to drive away all the foxes from this forest. Hurry up. I want the operation to be over before sunset.”

The big animals combed the whole forest and drove all the foxes to the other side of the river.



Some of the young foxes and a few vixen who could not swim against the current were drowned. Chandarava saw the entire operation from the top of a hillock. He heaved a sign of relief, now that there was no fox left on this side of the forest able to identify him.

The exiled foxes huddled together on the other side of the forest. Why should a god-sent king turn hostile only towards them? Who was this little blue monster? They stood perplexed.

The sun went down and the horizon looked red. As was their custom, the foxes raised a collective howl to mark the end of the day.



Chandarava was enjoying an evening walk on the opposite bank, followed by a train of lions and tigers he had appointed as ministers and courtiers. But no sooner had he heard the howl than he forgot all about his lofty position and, looking upward, gave out a lusty howl himself.

The lions and tigers, stood stunned—but only for a moment. Next they woke up to the great deception that had been played upon them. Their blood boiling with rage, they advanced towards Chandarava. Sensing danger, Chandarava tried to run away. But it was a vain bid. He was seized upon and torn to pieces. His blueness was found to be not even skin deep.

Before midnight the harassed foxes, informed about the end of the blue monster's brief rule, were back in their good old forest. The big animals, out of shame, did not show their faces to them for a very long time.



Gold—More Gold

In the city of Malyapur lived the honest Ramdas. He was happily married and had two small sons.

But when, to his great dismay, his wife died of a sudden illness, Ramdas was faced with a problem. Who would look after the boys? He thought over it for long and decided to leave them at their maternal uncle's house situated in a faraway village.

But before setting out with his sons, Ramdas carried his wife's precious ornaments and all his money to his rich neighbour, Saitansingh.

"Brother, this is all I have for my sons for them to make use of in future. Please keep it safe," he said to his neighbour.

"Be sure," Saitansingh assured him, "that your property will be safe with me



as the sun is in the sky.”

Saitansingh, unfortunately, was as greedy as he was rich. When Ramdas returned to Malyapur after a few months and wished to get his wealth back, Saitansingh handed over to him a box of fake ornaments and counterfeit coins. Ramdas soon found out how terribly cheated he had been. He returned to his sons, told them of Saitansingh’s treachery,

and soon died a heart-broken man.

Years passed. The two sons of Ramdas grew up to be bright young men. They took to trading in gold and grew rich. But they never forgot Saitansingh's treachery and their father's anguish. One day they set out for their native town, Malyapur.

The elder brother had grown long hair and a beard. Donning the guise of a holy man, he took residence in a deserted temple on the river that flowed by Malyapur.

The younger one dressed up as a prince. With a retinue of servants, he went to live in a rented house opposite Saitansingh's mansion.

The 'prince' lived luxuriously and entertained important people lavishly and gave alms to the needy generously. Before long he attracted Saitansingh's attention.

"Good God! This young man is spending money as sportively as a farmer scatters seeds on his field! He hands the beggar a rupee when a paisa would do. Every evening musicians sing before him for handsome rewards. What a pity that

money that ought to be locked up in iron chests is being thrown away to beggars and singers!" thought Saitansingh.

He called on the 'prince' and pleased him with flattering words. The 'prince' also showed much respect for him. They became friends.

"Thief, thief!" the prince shouted one night. The neighbours came running to his house. The young man told them that some burglars had entered his bedroom. They were about to carry away his caskets—full of gold—when he woke up and raised the cry. The burglars escaped.

Saitansingh did not allow this opportunity to slip by. He waited until all the other neighbours had left. "O noble prince," he then said, "It is not wise for you to live in this unsafe house. I'm your friend and my house is like a castle. Shouldn't you be pleased to come over to my home and live with me as my honoured guest? You and your wealth will be safe in my house."

The prince thanked him and accepted





the proposal. A dozen caskets, supposedly laden with gold, were carried to Saitansingh's house. The guest was shown into a big room. He heaved a sigh of relief to see his valuable caskets arrayed near his bed.

Saitansingh's joy was great at the sight of his guest's wealth. It only heightened his eagerness to usurp it. In his mind he spun on plans to achieve his end. He hardly slept a wink.

One day the prince's servants

announced that their master had taken ill. He touched no food. At least that is the impression his host was given. The illness seemed to linger on.

One morning the prince called Saitansingh to his bedside and mumbled out, "My days are numbered. In my dream I was asked to make a gift of all my wealth to a certain holy man. He lives in a deserted temple on the river-bank. My host! Will you kindly visit him and beg him to come here?"

Saitansingh had already heard much about the holy man who stood on one leg for a long time in the morning and performed the same feat again in the evening. Who wouldn't be impressed by such penance? Besides, he was indifferent to worldly things. He distributed to the poor all the offerings he received from his devotees.

Saitansingh hurried to meet the hermit. With a great show of humility, he requested to come and meet the dying prince.

“I don’t mind fulfilling the last wish of a dying man. But, the problem is, I hardly know the value of gold. Besides, can this lonely temple be a suitable place for storing gold?”

“Don’t you worry,” Saitansingh hastened to say. “I know—rather, know very well—the value of gold. I will undertake to sell them on your behalf should the need arise. So far as their safety is concerned, I am ready to keep them in my house. And I should feel honoured if you too are pleased to come down and stay with me!”

Saitansingh made the request feigning love and devotion. What could the compassionate hermit do but agree to the proposal? He duly arrived at Saitansingh’s house. After showing some reluctance, he accepted the wealth from the dying prince and blessed him.

But lo and behold! Such was the power of the holy man’s blessings that instead of wasting away, the prince recovered miraculously. Along with the holy man, he showed a fondness for eating all the

best things in the world—at Saitansingh's expense, of course!

Days passed. At last the prince prepared to leave for his kingdom. He requested that the holy man accompany him. The holy man was willing to oblige, but how could he go away before disposing of all his gold?

Once again Saitansingh proved ready to come to his help.

"Since you are in a hurry, I can spare you the botheration of going to the bazaar and bargaining with the merchants. I can buy it up. The noble soul that you are, I don't mind paying you a price higher than what you can get at the market."

"How kind of you!" said the holy man.

Saitansingh's joy knew no bounds. He paid to the holy man one-tenth of the price of gold. Even then he had to pay such a large sum of money that he was left penniless.

An hour after the prince and the holy man had taken leave of him, Saitansingh carried a piece of his newly-acquired gold to a goldsmith.

“You call this gold? Ha, ha! Gold? Ha, ha, ha! Next you will call a butterfly an eagle!” the goldsmith guffawed.

Saitansingh soon learnt to his great shock that what he had purchased with sackfuls of coins was hardly worth a pouchful of coins!

He ran to the king and wailed before him, narrating how he had been duped.



The king at once ordered his officers to look for the two strangers. Both were still in the city. They came to the king's court most willingly.

The trial began.

"I did not sell my gold to anybody. I made a gift of it to the holy man and was cured by his blessing. Since then the gold had been his. I had nothing to do with it,"



declared the prince. The king found his statement sensible enough. "I had warned Saitansingh that to me gold was no different from stone. I had no knowledge of its value. It is Saitansingh who proposed to buy them. It is he who fixed the price. I distributed the money he gave me among the poor," said the holy man.

And the king found his statement no less sensible.

"Saitansingh! I'm sorry for you, but this is a strange situation. The prince cannot be held responsible for what he had already given away. The mendicant cannot be held responsible either. It is you who volunteered to buy this metal. You fixed the price. It was for you to make sure that what you were buying was gold!" said the king.

The two brothers thanked the king and returned home.

Saitansingh never appeared in public again. But, for what seemed like a very long time thereafter, strange wailing noises could be heard coming from his shattered house.

MYSTERY OF A DREAM

Once upon a time there was a gentleman-king whose only love was sound sleep and who never bothered to remember a dream if he ever had any. But one night he gave out a terrific shriek and sat up on his creamy tender bed.

His terrified servants did not dare to come near him and ask what disturbed the royal slumber. They rushed to the prime minister.

The king's shiver had not stopped when the prime minister appeared before him.

"The sunrise is still hours away, my Lord, what's the matter with you?" the wise minister queried in a especially affectionate voice.

"No matter, unless you call a dream a matter," replied the king.

"His Majesty never ceases to be a

philosopher even amidst a crisis, you know,” remarked the minister looking at the servants peeping through the door. Turning to the king, he asked again, “What could have happened, your Majesty?” His voice sounded like a purr compared to the king’s which was like a howl.

“Nothing unless a dream is a happening. Nevertheless, something ominous, I’m afraid, is going to happen to me,” said the king as he sighed.

“My Lord, I’m rather puzzled,” said the minister.

“As if I’m not!” commented the king and proceeded to narrate his dream which, in brief, was this:

Somehow he had lost his way in the forest and it was growing dark. He did not know when and how he came there and what happened to his faithful horse and body-guards. He climbed a tree to survey the area. Indeed, how lucky was he to have done so in time, for the very next moment he saw a pack of hyenas emerging from a nearby cave and circling



the tree. They looked at him menacingly and made several attempts to climb the tree. The king sat on a branch, clinging to another, scared stiff. He could tumble down any moment, he feared.

Just then he saw three jolly young men galloping in his direction from some highlands in the forest's vicinity. He cried out for help. All the three saw him, but the first one merely yawned and trotted away. To the king's horror, the second one gave a lusty cheer to the hyenas and laughed and disappeared. However, the third one turned his horse at once towards his tree. The hyenas were furiously clawing at the tree. "Hurry up, young man!" shouted the king and that woke him up.

"Extraordinary, my Lord," commented the minister.

"Should I care two hoots if it were ordinary? But, my friend, don't advise me to consult our court soothsayers about it. Should the dream signify my death, they would say that I was to soon get a nymph for my latest bride. What do I do?"

The king got off his bejewelled bedstead and paced on the floor in a restless manner.

“My Lord, I’ve a feeling—strange—that the dream has something to do with your three worthy sons,” observed the minister, keeping pace with the king.

The king came to an abrupt halt. He stood silent for a few moments, deeply meditative, and said, “ I too have a feeling—strange—that you are speaking a fat lot of sense, my friend.”

“Thanks, my good Lord,” said the minister with a brief bow and continued, “I suggest that we ask the three princes to find out the meaning of the dream.”

“An excellent idea. And the one to explain the dream to my satisfaction would be the one to succeed me to the throne. Well, why not!” He murmured in the way of a soliloquy.

The princes were summoned immediately. The king narrated his dream to them and said, “My boys, I give you twenty-four hours. Go wherever and

consult whomsoever you like. But you must be back by tomorrow morning."

The eldest prince who was still lamenting the loss of his sleep, hurried back to his cozy bed and ordered for an extra blanket to sleep under it with a vengeance. He did not get up till the sun had crossed the tallest tree in their eastern garden by which time he had enough of his own dreams to forget all about his father's dream.

But his two brothers galloped away forthwith and the two went in opposite directions.

The youngest prince met several sooth-sayers, scholars and astrologers and heard their explanation of the dream with attention, but did not feel quite satisfied with them.

On the remote frontiers of the kingdom stood a hill. Atop the hill, in a cave, lived a weird old woman. Some called her witch and some revered her as wise, but all agreed that she could see the shape of things to come. She could also solve, with

as much ease as adding one and one, all sorts of knotty problems which people brought to her, if she was pleased.

By sundown the prince and his horse were extremely tired. Leaving the horse at the foot of the hill, the prince climbed the rocks with great difficulty. In the twilight he saw the mysterious woman looking as haggard as a withered broom warming her shrunken fingers in a fire in front of her cave. The flames looked unearthly white.

The prince bowed to her and the woman sported a smile which would have scared even a scarecrow.

“O wise woman of the hill, will you mind explaining a dream my father the king dreamt last night?”

The woman nodded. But no sooner had the prince begun narrating the dream than she said, “I know, I know. I’ll tell you what it means. But will you promise to marry my grand-daughter?” The prince was least prepared for such a bargain, “Ah, ah...” he hemmed and hawed and



managed to say, "Well, your grand-daughter must be wonderful since she is your grand-daughter... But... But..."

"You'll like to see her, I'm sure," said the woman and she called out for her ward.

Out came a creature who had a figure as vague as an owl's reflection on a

unsteady water and who greeted the prince in a voice that would have endeared her to a braying donkey.

The prince took a step back and sighed, but managed to say, "Well, frankly, your grand-daughter does not quite resemble the picture of the bride I had cherished, but I will marry her if my father is satisfied with the meaning you read into his dream. Your grand-daughter must marry somebody after all. And it is important that we know what the king's dream means, for he believes it has something to do with his death."

"It has, my boy, it has. His end may come tonight."

"Tonight?" cried out the prince.

"Tonight. But did I say that he must die tonight? Someone would try to kill him tonight. That's all I said."

"My wise grandma, allow me to hurry back and stand guard on him," said the prince.

"You are a worthy son," commented the woman with a chuckle. "But careful,

don't breathe a word to anybody about it. Hide yourself and expect the assassin. For the full meaning of the dream, meet me tomorrow."

The prince rode back as fast as his tired horse could carry him. He reached the palace on time to hide himself in the king's bed-chamber, behind a screen, before the king retired for the night.

The musicians sang a couple of lullabies and left when the king's snoring surpassed their volume.

By and by the palace became as quiet as a lonely hill-top. Then, to his horror the prince saw a stranger emerging from the darkness under the king's bedstead, dagger in hand. He was about to stab the king when the prince sprang out and surprised the would-be assassin, brandishing his dazzling sword.

The commotion woke up the king with a jolt. He shouted for his servants. They rushed in and captured the stranger after a brief tussle. The news spread as fast as wild fire and brought to the scene the

prime minister, the members of the family, the commander of the army and several others—even the sleepy eldest prince.

Nobody could recognize the culprit and the fellow refused to speak.

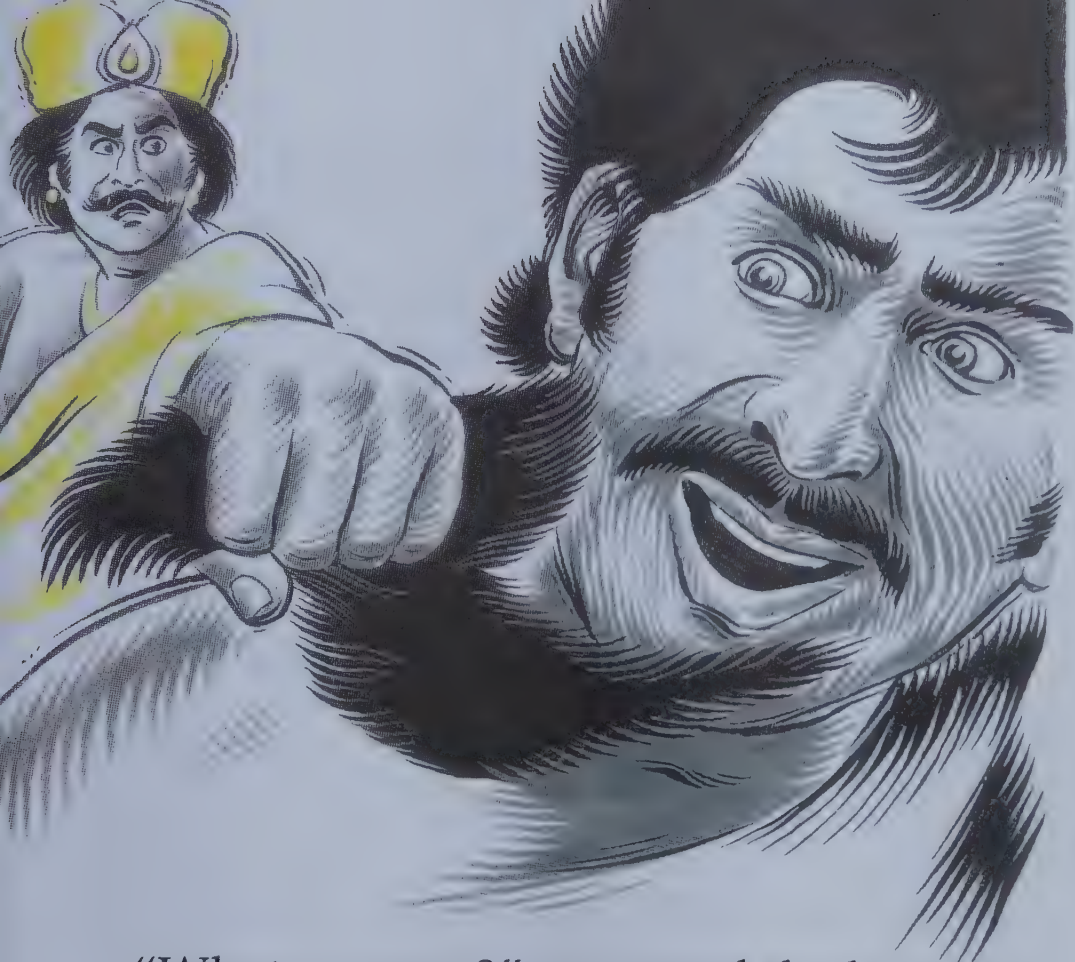
The prince narrated all that he had done and said, “Father, we are yet to know the complete meaning of your dream. I must return to the woman on the hill to find it out.”

“I must accompany you. I must thank her personally. But for her I would have lain like an empty bag devoid of all my blood and soul. Also, we must lead the prisoner to her. She should be able to identify him.”

The royal procession to the hill set out forthwith. It was morning when the party reached the hill-top. All greeted the old woman who sat warming her fingers—in violet flames this time—and the king thanked her profusely. The prince then requested her to explain the meaning of the complete dream.

“It is clear, as clear as this morning sky,

that the king's bodyguards deserting him in the forest meant there was laziness and callousness everywhere. People were negligent of their duty. The hyenas stood for the forces of violence. The tree the king climbed was his own goodness that sustained him. The three young men who rode in his direction were the three princes. The first prince was too lazy to be of any use to the king. The second prince too had no individuality of his own. Both were swept by the forces dominating the atmosphere. In fact, the second prince had met me before the youngest prince. I had told him that the night ahead was dangerous for the king. If the king survived the night, he would live long. The second prince did not like that the king should live long. Just as the eldest prince was a victim of laziness in the atmosphere, the second prince had been possessed by the forces of violence dominating the atmosphere. He decided to kill the king in order to usurp the throne. He donned a disguise and hid under the king's bedstead."



“What, my son?” screamed the king as he pulled the false beard off the young man’s chin. There stood before him his second son.

Continued the woman, looking at the king, “The young man who came to your rescue in your dream, was needless to say, your youngest son. He has already proved how true your dream was. His head and heart alone was not affected by the atmosphere.”

“I feel so delighted at having my dream

explained so well," exclaimed the king.

"You are satisfied aren't you, father? In that case, please allow me to marry this good old lady's grand-daughter. I promised to marry her if the grand dame's explanation of your dream satisfied you," said the prince, his voice as apologetic as it could be.

"Surely, my son, marry her by all means! Should we not have a look at her at the earliest opportunity?"

"Don't, father, don't," cried out the prince, hiding his face by his palms.

But before long, at the old woman's call, there appeared before them a maiden as beautiful as the dawn and endowed with a voice as sweet as the nightingale's.

"How lucky my boy is!" exclaimed the king and he patted him on the back. The embarrassed prince opened his eyes and saw the very picture of beauty and grace before him and himself looked simply bewildered.

Explained the old woman, "My grand-daughter was under a curse. That explains

why she looked like an ogress. It had been so ordained that the day a truthful young man would promise to marry her, her curse would end. The day has come at last."

The marriage was performed with great pomp and ceremony. The king ordered that the two elder princes be banished. He crowned the youngest prince the king and himself retired into the solitude of the hill with the old woman for his guide.

But the very first thing the new king did was to pardon his brothers.

"They are not bad. They were merely the victims of the forces of laziness and violence prevalent in the atmosphere. We must try our best to change the atmosphere with truthfulness and courage. Once we succeed in this, they too would become better men," he said.

And better times did come soon, under the noble rule of the new king and his queen.

THE BEWILDERED GIANT

There was a flood of moonlight and the forest looked enchanted. So did the glade, and the silver brook running across it bubbling sweetly all the while.

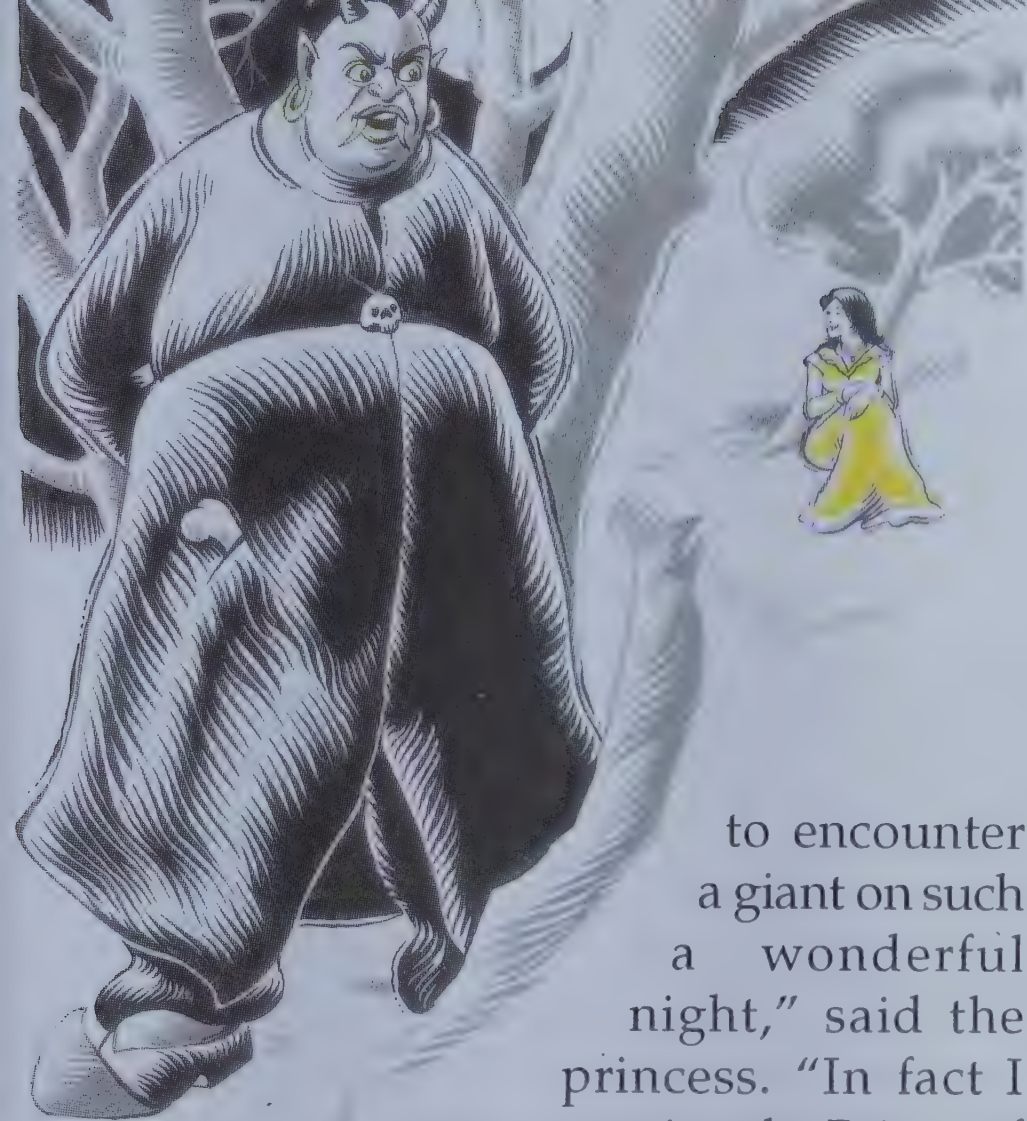
The princess stood alone, leaning against a Chompuc tree overflowing with golden flowers which delighted the region with an exotic fragrance.

Suddenly a huge shadow fell across the glade. Looking askance, what should the princess see but a giant figure popping up before her! It did not take her long to understand that it was not just a giant figure, but a giant proper. He regarded her with a degree of uncanny curiosity.

The princess heaved a sigh.

"Why did you sigh?" asked the giant in a rather cracking voice.

"To be frank, I least expected



to encounter a giant on such a wonderful night," said the princess. "In fact I was expecting the Prince of Horizon," she added but not before another sigh.

"Did you say the Prince of Horizon?" muttered the giant. "Well the name sounds rather familiar! Who is he, if you don't mind?"

"Must be a brave and charming prince. It was prophesied that he would come to

our rescue. But now everything seems to be lost!" said the princess as she sighed for a third time.

The giant looked sad. "I'm sorry—and am no less surprised that you don't faint right away at the sight of a giant like me!" he observed.

And retorted the princess, "You believe you look terrible, do you? Only if you had some idea about the giant we had to face earlier! Why do you think we are hiding in this forest? That nasty giant ravaged our land. He devoured so many and so many more fled the land. He had a special fancy for the royal brood. That explains why my parents and I had to take refuge in the woods."

The giant who was listening to the princess with great attention said, "Even your story sounds familiar. How? I feel bewildered. But goodness me, I'm no less hungry—in fact hungry like a giant!"

"No wonder, for you are a giant!" the princess reminded him.

"Indeed, but do you know the normal

menu for a giant? Something strange has happened to me. I can't remember a thing," lamented the giant.

"I never knew that a giant could crack a joke," said the princess in a sorrowful voice. "Well, as you know pretty well, I cannot escape. Eat me up if you must. But promise that you will go away satisfied without taking the lives of my miserable parents." She struggled with two obstinate tears.

"Eat you?" shrieked the giant. "Eat you?" he shrieked again on a higher pitch. "Eat you—the most b-beau-beautiful, the most s-swee-sweet princess I had ever seen?" he stammered and broke into tears.

"Strange! Whoever had heard of a weeping giant!" the princess murmured to herself.

But something far more strange had begun to happen right before her eyes. As the giant wept he seemed to be growing smaller and smaller.

The princess hurried to say, "Please, stop weeping, will you? I have begun to

believe you. You surely don't mean to eat me. But eat you must something after all! Wait, my parents are asleep. I can fetch my share of our dinner for you."

She darted off returning with some fruits and a jug full of milk.

"Would you believe?" she said, "the trees around us lean over us so that we can pluck their fruit easily. A wild cow appears before our hut and continues to low until we have milked her. Such is the climate of love prevailing in this forest. No wonder that even a giant—no doubt you're a gentleman giant—would spare me."

The giant had already gulped down the milk and was busy munching the fruits, blinking at the princess all the while. It was obvious that he was trying as hard as he could to understand her.

But as soon as he had finished eating he broke into a fairly loud wail—and became even smaller.

"What an uncivilized giant I am to wolf down your entire dinner!" cried out



the giant, his voice mellow with repentance.

"I knew that people grow pale and thin by weeping a lot. I never knew that one

could diminish like a melting snow doll simply by shedding tears!" remarked the princess.

"Did I know it myself? I'm more and more bewildered, I must confess!" said the giant. But he could not stop weeping and shrinking even faster. Soon he looked no bigger than a wee toy for a toddler.

"Stop weeping, please! Otherwise there will be absolutely nothing left of you!" cautioned the princess.

"Really?" The pocket giant surveyed himself, amazement writ large on his face. Not only did he stop weeping, but also sported a smile. And to the pleasant surprise of the princess, he began to laugh. And his laughter sounded like sweet twangs of a sitar.

"Do you consider shrinking to a vanishing point so very funny?" asked the princess, no doubt a bit confused.

"If I vanish I would not have to gobble up your food," replied the giant—or whatever was left of the giant, and he laughed even more spiritedly, his laughter now



sounding like tilting strains of a remote flute.

He then frolicked around like a squirrel. Then, before the eyes of the amazed princess, the tiny thing turned into a bird.

"Now I understand," he whistled. "When a giant weeps, he diminishes; when he laughs, he becomes a bird."

“You cannot imagine how sweet you look,” said the princess, dancing and clapping her tender palms. “How much I would like you to remain with me forever! I’ll scout and find for you the sweetest fruits.”

The giant-turned-bird said, “But I cannot help feeling a bit bewildered...”

But the princess was absorbed in conjuring up a sweet future for both. “You’ll sing for me and I’ll sing for you,” she said which sounded almost like a song.

“You’ll sing for me, will you dear princess? Then why not do so?” The bird—unless you would still call him a giant—was all agog with excitement.

The princess began to sing. It was a song about the moonlit nights and the twinkling stars, about a moon who was all smiles and a baby cloud who had lost its way. ...

While singing the princess forgot herself and her situation and kept gazing into the sky.

"Look here, Princess, I'm no more bewildered!"

It was a sweet voice, but a human voice.

The princess turned to look and—lo and behold—what she found was a charming young man smiling upon her.

"Don't tell me that a giant becomes a young man when he listens to a song!" exclaimed the princess. And she was thrilled that the young man's appearance matched the vision she had of the Prince of the Horizon, down to the last detail.

"Indeed, a giant does change into a young man, O Princess, if he was a young man who had temporarily been changed into a giant," said the young man with a gentle bow, and he added, "I am the Prince of the Horizon. I had to accept a spell and grown into a giant myself so that I could confront the real giant who wrought havoc in your kingdom, and drive it away. I did that and with great pleasure I inform you that your land and your castle are yours again. But had forgotten who I really was. It is your

company and because of your courtesy and kindness that I became myself once again."

The prince bowed in gratitude.

And the princess too bowed in gratitude to him.

They talked and talked till the king and the queen woke up and caught them red handed while they caught each other's hands.

And a few days later, after they had been wedded, they paid a visit to the forest. It was a moonlit night once again and it so happened that both of them muttered at the same time, "I feel so bewildered!"

And it so happened that, looking equally amused, they asked each other at the same time, "But why?"

And it so happened that both said at the same time, "How did this happen? But what a wonderful thing to happen!"



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